



Introduction

Affirming that the priest is like anyone else in nature, St. Cafasso called the priest to be different from others in virtue and character as his priesthood demands. Then, he outlined the fundamental dispositions to live as good priests, such as hard work, sacrifice, simplicity of life and reserve. And now he offers modesty as the means that the priest should adopt.

How should a priest be in his external appearance? God, who is invisible, has chosen the priest, who is visible, to represent Him, to remind the people about Him, and even to picture Him. The priest has to be a ray of divinity, a mirror of divinity. If so, how should the priest form himself to be a god on earth? All that the priest needs is only one virtue, one that has within itself all other virtues: Modesty.

What is modesty?

Modesty refers to bodily movements and actions done decently & honestly, both in those things done seriously and in those done in play (St. Thomas Aquinas). Modesty is not merely an exterior quality, although it may appear so. It is a real virtue rooted in the moderation of human passions and affections. So, a priest cannot be modest in his bearing, words, gestures, looks, etc., if he does not have humility, patience, meekness, charity, chastity, prudence, and other virtues.

Modesty is cultivated by mortifying one's senses constantly, readily and absolutely. Modesty is like a cross on which the person is nailed immobile, day and night, when alone or with others, when he works or rests.

Importance of modesty

The modest priest brings honour and glory to God, edifies people and enjoys a good reputation.

The priest brings honour and glory to God by his modesty: We want God to be esteemed, honoured and served with respect & love. We try to make the people form a good and dignified idea of God.



We know that people form an idea of God, religion, or all religious practices according to the idea they have formed of God's ministers, the priests! Modesty is that virtue that makes the priest revered almost like a god. If the priest lacks modesty, then, for the people, everything becomes contemptible, even God Himself! That is why St. Ambrose says: "It is fitting that the public esteem be the witness of our actions; that one who sees the minister adorned with virtues will praise and worship the Lord, who has such worthy servants!" At a solemn public function, one wanted to know who among them were actually priests. The other answered, "Those who keep their eyes lowered are the priests!" This is

how people see the priest: not by degrees, positions, or habit, but by our composed modest, external appearance.

Edification of others: A good example is the one that touches, moves and edifies effectively and infallibly! Homilies, counsels, and preachings do edify, but not with that force of an example! Council of Trent says: "Nothing constantly instructs others in piety and the worship of God than the life and example of those who have devoted

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themselves to the sacred service." The same Council also affirms that the example is the permanent kind of preaching, a continuous sermon. The priest preaches with his eyes, hands, feet, clothes, hair, and everything. His peaceful & serene face, modest eyes, pleasant & candid countenance, his firm & quiet head, his dignified bearing, his natural & serious talk, his manner of dress (modest), everything matters. This type of preaching is so strong that it never goes unheeded: it directs the soul towards God and makes it ashamed of its evil.

Our reputation: The priest

should enjoy a good reputation. If a priest does not enjoy the good reputation, confidence & esteem of the people, then how will they devoutly attend his mass or listen to his sermons? How many people will go to him for confessions (even if he is sound in doctrine or good in preaching)? Will you entrust your soul into the hands of such a one? No wonder the Apostles placed one of the conditions for being chosen as a deacon as 'they be men who have good reputation'! That is why Paul exhorted Timothy & Titus to behave so that no one dared to show a sign of little esteem!

This reputation is obtained by modesty! "A man may be known by his look, and one that hath understanding by his countenance, when thou meetest him. A man's attire, and excessive laughter, and gait, show what he is." (Sir 19:29-30) Just as the value of the gold lies in its substance (internal, cannot be seen) but is attested by the colour, the sound, the weight, etc. (seen, verified), so also, the one who is disciplined & wise will have to show it by good conversation, good bearing.

The priest clothes himself in modesty.

Modesty should always envelop the priest from head to foot, wherever he is. Council of Trent: "It is absolutely fitting for clerics, who are called to the lot of the Lord, to compose all their lives and manners, such as habit, gesture, conduct, speech, and others, and in all things, they should carry before them nothing but seriousness, moderateness and fullness of religion." The Council also further prescribes modesty in dress (what colour, of what cut, of what size), the gestures of the hands (how to hold them, how to move them, when to stop them, with what moderation, with what respect and measure), the way of walking (in the Church & outside), in speaking (what words to use and what not, tonality) and in everything. He is a priest when he eats, sleeps, laughs, plays, walks and has fun – he must let everyone know that he is a man of the Church and a man of God.

Means to modesty

What means could the priest use to become modest? An awareness and a way of being.

An awareness: The priest should be aware that he is continually under the gaze of God: "God sees me, God hears me, God looks at me, in this moment he is looking at me, ... me, who have the task of representing Him. If I speak, it is as if God spoke; if I look, it is as if God were looking ... Everything is more His than mine. So, the revelation God makes on earth now depends on me."

A way of being: The priest should do away with those looks; hold back those words, steady those hands, be more serious in his stride, more decent in the way of sitting, and exhibit more decorum in the whole person.

